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Ford 1927

A Translation with Commentary

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Abstract: After Japan's defeat in World War II in 1945, 6.9 million Japanese had to repatriate from the country's overseas possessions. These returnees, the so-called *hikiagesha*, constitute a particular case within Japan's postcolonial memory discourse. Having lost their perceived home in the colonies, they first became fugitives and subsequently an Other within Japanese society as they grew to be associated with the now undesired memory of Japanese imperial aggression. Some turned to writing to make their voices heard in the postcolonial Japanese narrative on the colonial period. A critically acclaimed representative of the *hikiagesha* literary scene is Kobayashi Masaru, born in 1927 in Chinju, Kyōngsang-namdo Province, in what is now South Korea. The present text is a translation of one of his most widely read works, *Ford 1927* (*Fōdo senkyūhyakunijūnana-nen*, 1956), published in 1956 in *Shin Nihon bungaku* (New Japanese Literature). *Ford 1927* deals with a Japanese protagonist who comes down with tuberculosis at the front in Manchuria and subsequently reminisces about his childhood in 1930s rural Korea. His memory revolves around a Turkish family who, as proud owners of the only car in the village, call into question the colonial power hierarchy between the Japanese and Korean population. The text is remarkable in its multi-faceted description of the ambivalent interactions between Korean and Japanese characters and it differs from the often simplistic framing of colonial-period power relations in the political discourse of both countries. Through the ambiguous character of the Turk, the piece rejects a monolithic reading of “West” versus “East Asia” and instead underscores Japan's complex positionality of “Orientalised coloniser” from a postcolonial perspective. *Ford 1927* thus grants us insight on a much-neglected piece in the jigsaw puzzle of East Asian colonial memory – the

Original Title: *Fōdo senkyūhyakunijūnana-nen* フォード・千九百二十七年, by Kobayashi Masaru 小林勝

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hikiagesha as living reminders of Japan's imperial project and their awkward position in-between different discursive strands of postcolonial Japan.

Keywords: Hikiagesha, postcolonial memory, Japanese imperialism, Korea, Kobayashi Masaru

1 Commentary

Kobayashi Masaru 小林勝 was born in 1927 in Chinju in Kyōngsang-namdo Province in what is now South Korea. He was a member of the so-called *hikiagesha*, the Japanese returnees from the colonies after the country's defeat in World War II. By the time Japan lost the war, 6.9 million Japanese people, or nearly nine per cent of the total population of seventy-two million, were outside of the home islands and had to be repatriated. Back in Japan, and contrary to the experience of other countries' returnees such as those in Germany, their stories of suffering were not integrated into the national narrative of victimisation. Instead, they became a kind of domestic Other which served to distance Japanese civil society from atrocities committed in the name of imperialism.¹

Kobayashi joined the Communist Party in 1948, and he would remain a member until 1965. During a demonstration in 1952 against Japan's involvement in the Korean War, he threw a Molotov cocktail and was arrested, but it would not be until 1959 that he served a year in prison for the incident. He joined the progressive Shin Nihon Bungakkai (New Japanese Literary Association) in 1955 and many of his stories, including *Ford 1927* (フォード・千九百二十七年, 1956), were first published in the association's journal *Shin Nihon bungaku* (*New Japanese Literature*). His life was cut short by illness and in 1971 he died from tuberculosis, aged only 43.

Throughout his literary career that spanned roughly fifteen years, Kobayashi was inspired by his childhood in Korea to write numerous pieces of short fiction. However, far from merely recounting his own personal experiences, Kobayashi strove to give voice to various different actors within the colonial cacophony (although, arguably, Korean voices are often more like background tunes than lead singers in his works). *Ford 1927* is remarkable in that it critically investigates Japan's imperial past in a nuanced way. Throughout his entire opus and particularly in this text, Kobayashi emphasises the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of colonial power and thus sets himself apart from the simplistic delineations between perpetrator and victim that we often find in

¹ Watt 2009.

political discursive texts. *Ford 1927* points to the various shifts in the power dynamic between Japanese colonisers and Korean colonised, underscored by the multi-faceted character of the Turk who defies binary readings of “Occident” versus “Orient.” In effect, Kobayashi’s story highlights Japan’s special position as “Orientalised coloniser”.

The Japanese colonisation of Korea from 1910 to 1945 that was terminated by Japan’s defeat in World War II continues to cast long shadows. Even more than fifty years after the 1965 Japan-Republic of Korea normalisation treaty, by which both countries resumed diplomatic relationships, the legacy of Japanese imperialism on the Korean peninsula continues to engender bilateral frictions between the two countries. These frictions are regularly fuelled by controversies centred on, for example, the women who were forced into prostitution in military brothels (the so-called “Comfort Women”) or territorial disputes. A major factor in Kobayashi’s personal decision to get politically involved was his indignation and sense of injustice that the first stimulus for Japan’s post-war economy depended upon its material support for the Korean War that took place from 1950 to 1953.

Along with *Ford 1927*, two other pieces by Kobayashi – *Gun’yō rogo kyōtei* (Textbook for Russian for Military Use, 1956) and *Kakyō* (Building Bridges, 1960) – were nominated for the prestigious Akutagawa Prize, although all three fell short of the award. Ever since Kobayashi’s death, a pervasive silence has surrounded his literary work in Japanese academia, with the exception of only a handful of publications.² However, the struggle around the contested legacy of Japan’s imperialist past and the wish not to leave the prerogative of interpretation to right-wing sections of society can be inferred from the inclusion of *Ford 1927* in the recent anthology *Korekushon sensō to bungaku* (Collection War and Literature).³ This anthology underscores the renewed currency of *hikiagesha* literature in contemporary Japan. The following translation is based on that edition of the story. In South Korea, meanwhile, especially following So Rimsŭng and I Wŏnhŭi’s translation of four of Kobayashi’s pieces of short fiction in 2007,⁴ his relationship to colonial Korea has been taken up actively by scholars,⁵ attesting to the relevance of

² In addition to numerous articles by Hara Yūsuke, the most prominent examples include Isogai 1992; Kawamura 1997.

³ Kobayashi 2012.

⁴ Kobayashi 2007.

⁵ Examples include, without any claim to completeness, I Wŏnhŭi 2001; Ch’oe Chunho 2011; Jung 2012.

Kobayashi's work for the sustained East Asian debate surrounding the legacy of Japan's empire.

2 Translation

Ford 1927 by Kobayashi Masaru

"That's odd," he said. "So that means you neither saw how the Turk came to the town nor how he left it?"

At that moment, I saw a shadow of a mean scornful grin resurfacing openly in his eyes. He carried on with a determined tone, as if trying to emphasise his point.

"In other words – you're a poet. Because if not, well, that means that you are having another fever spike."

"Even if I didn't see it, I know it all," I said before starting to furiously mumble to myself.

The Turk had come to the town in early Shōwa,⁶ when I was still an infant. By the time the Turk had left, I was a student at a foreign language school in Tokyo. Still, to me it was as though I not only could see the scene before my inner eye, I could even hear their voices accompanying it. But as soon as I tried speaking, my throat started hurting. I gave up explaining it to him.

The unit had already begun their retreat. Meanwhile, on the floor of a desolated local house on top of a hill near Jinan, the two of us had spread our rush mats and collapsed there. I was a private in the land forces. Now that we had finally arrived here, after walking on foot from deep in the mountains, I had become a bedridden patient with pulmonary tuberculosis. He was a combat medic with the rank of a superior private and had been attending to me. He was sleeping not because his body was weary, but because there was nothing else to do.

When I turned my back to him, there was a mud wall before my eyes. I slowly looked up. There was a small square window opened wide and beyond that was the deep blue sky.

"Beneath the sky of this continent and the adjoining land ...," I whispered to myself. Despite myself, a dry laugh escaped my mouth.

In the middle of the town deep in the mountains at the source of the Nakdong River, there was a square surrounded by poplars. There were not any flowerbeds, nor any benches or swings. It was just a space with pebbles scattered around. However, for some reasons the locals called that place "the park".

⁶ The period from 1926 to 1989.

When summer came, the tenacious and sweet scent of the newly sprouted poplar buds filled the park. In winter, the wind carried the smell of cow dung into the town where it spread out.

The “park” was surrounded by shops carrying the names of various Japanese regions. Behind the poplar trees, there were houses with signs that said “Tōkyō-dō” (that was the clock maker), “Ōsaka-ya” (that was the *udon* shop), “New Isahaya” (that was a café with two waitresses). In other words, these people from various places in Japan had decided to cross the ocean. They had come to this town deep in the mountains and given their stores names that represented their respective origins. Those names were usually something from their memories, but sometimes confusing names were carried in by the railway.

For example, one afternoon when the field railway train that terminated in this town had just arrived, new people entered the empty house next to the New Isahaya. They coated the window with white paint and the word “Amarume” appeared there.

“Amarume? Which prefecture is that? With which Chinese characters do you write that?”

The locals with their friendly neighbourly attitude quickly went to the house and learned that the town whose name sounded like that of a fish was a vital point for the railway in Yamagata Prefecture. Thus, even though most of the children had been born in the colony, they were terribly well informed about Japanese place names and products. Even about local Japanese specialities.

I forgot to mention, but facing “the park” stood one normal Japanese house without a sign. The poplars grew even more rampantly there. Where they had begun to fully resemble a small thicket lived the family of the local police sergeant in a small house enclosed by a wooden fence. The sergeant was a big man with a moustache, and the sight of him leaving the house in long steps, dressed up carrying a sabre with a white pattern and dazzlingly white gloves was truly impressive. And his son, who since the entrance ceremony attended fifth grade of primary school and was the smallest boy in his class, trotted following him, almost falling over. Well, this primary school boy was me.

On two days in late autumn, the cow market would be held in “the park”. The cows would be dragged to this town deep in the mountains from the villages that lay even further in the mountains. Ceaselessly they came in via a couple of radial roads leading towards “the park”. And at ten in the morning, “the park” was crammed with brown cows and people wearing white clothing. The big eyes of the brown cows darted around confusedly and gazed uneasily at the people who threw commands around, and their plaintive cries echoed from “the park” into the town. Eventually, the cows would be dragged by their muzzle down a

different road by a different person. Once the cow market had ended, the park would go back to being lonelier than even before and quiet. But now the earth was completely covered with something that hadn't been there before – the cows had left souvenirs on the ground. They emitted heat like freshly baked flatbread, but day by day, they dried, lost their shape, and their colour became indistinguishable from the soil so that eventually, even when there was no wind, they would be covered by the falling leaves of the poplar trees until one could not even tell where they had been.

Winter came from the T'aebaek Mountains. In the beginning, a wind that was not even that strong blew through the town, slipped into every road and proceeded while making the glass doors of the houses ring. Then those winds suddenly came flying from the different roads into "the park", collided, and created a small tornado.

Thereupon the leaves of the poplar trees and the powdered cowpats mixed with dust and whirled up dancing. My sensitive nose could detect the subtly scorched scent. When the wind came blowing and this scent began to hang in the dry air, this meant that it was winter already. Therefore I, whose house was next to "the park", was quick to proclaim those news when I came to school.

"The park smelled of dried cowpats this morning!"

"Really, well, then winter is coming soon," they all said and gazed at the T'aebaek Mountains that rose high north to our school yard.

In January and February, the wind raged in "the park" and sometimes it was mixed with snow as well. The poplar trees lifted countless arms into the grey sky as if pleading for help, bent their trunks and groaned. And then, the fallen leaves of the poplars and the smell of winter were all blown away to God knows where before one even knew.

And when it became March, I stood in the middle of "the park" on a day when for once there was no wind and there was no more of the winter smell. I noticed then that the poplar trees prepared new leaves in order to replace the ones that had been blown away and I pictured how inside their trunks clear water steadily dashed upwards to the top. Even if I vigorously sucked in the air through my nose, the inside of my nose was not dry anymore and did not hurt because there was a trace of moisture in the air. From the park you could see in the distance the lower reaches of the Naktong River whose water seemed to melt the daylight – soon, spring would come.

On such a day, I went to the acorn mountain. Actually, it was less of a mountain than a hill at the outskirts of the town. At the foot of the hill, there was a Korean house enclosed by a mud wall, but it seemed that the inhabitants had gone out for work and everything was dead silent without the slightest trace of a sound. We passed the old house that was deepest in the forest, muffling the

sound of our steps, because there was a rumour that a “man-eating hag” lived here and even though of course we did not really believe in the “eating people” bit, the house still gave off this spooky aura. Having passed that house, we had already arrived at the foot of the mountain where we found the remainders of rusty wire entanglements. We ignored them and went into the mountains. We had our minds set on collecting shiny acorns, but as we had agreed upon, no one went any further from halfway up the hill. The reason was that on top of the hill stood a Western-style building. There the Turkish family lived.

At that time, there existed not even one of those things called a taxi in the town. In the journals that came via the ocean every month, there were articles and pictures that showed that in Tokyo or Nagoya there existed those so-called taxis and that they were changing from a square box to a streamlined shape. But after all, that was Japan, which was separated by the sea. Here in this village in the mountains, there was not even a passenger vehicle, let alone a private car. Neither the head of the police owned a car, nor Kim the county head, nor Ri the great landowner, nor Ishigami the usurer who owned premises in the wide poplar tree forest, nor Sakamoto of the colonial bank who had dumbfounded people by newly building a house with eighteen rooms. The Turk, however, was the only one who owned a private car.

It was a now outdated model (of the year 1926 or 1927, to be precise) of a run-down Ford. The black paint was already peeling off from the square body of the car. The canopy, too, was covered with stains. Everything seemed loose and when it ran, it huffed and puffed, gave out tormented sighs and shook terribly. But without fail the Turk, a dry-goods dealer, would each day drive around the bumpy mountain roads in this car. And yet, all of this did not change the fact that this Ford was the only private car in the whole town.

Everybody in town knew that the Turks had appeared here in the early years of Shōwa not by train, but riding this car.

At that time, the majestic bridge made of reinforced concrete that spanned the Naktong River had not yet been built. There was only a wooden bridge that hung barely fifty centimetres above the water’s surface.

The wind had abruptly ceased. It was an incredibly hot day in midsummer. A large crowd of Koreans were casting their nets from above the bridge, exposing their chests to the sun and piling up the sturdy shoulders and muscles of their arms. The Naktong River lay silent and deep. In the dark brown nets that had been thrown out, the scales of fish glittered brightly. The children sat on the bridge and soaked their feet in the water. Biting their nails, they watched the scene. Then suddenly, from the shades of the reddish-brown mountains on the opposite shore, a car appeared. It came over the wooden bridge, wobbling and shaking.

Many Japanese had come to this town, but they had all arrived with the field railway train, so that a person coming in this manner, crossing the bridge with a car, was an unprecedented event. What was more, this car was a brand-new Ford with a tautly and pleasantly spread grey canopy without a single blotch. The pitch-black body of the car, too, was reflected in the countless mica buried in the dry riverbed of the Nakdong River and glittered. The spare tyre attached to the back of the car gave off the smell of fresh rubber that had not yet even once been tainted by the smell of soil. The Koreans were already used to the sight of Japanese people. In the distant past, first the soldiers wearing persimmon-coloured uniforms had come to this place in the deep mountains – that was the independence infantry battalion. A couple of years had passed since the insurrection that had centred on their neighbourhood was crushed by the bayonets of the soldiers. Thereupon the police came, the merchants came, a bank branch came, the moneylenders came, a court came, the school teachers came. The Koreans in the village learned Japanese and because the soldiers were no longer needed, they disappeared. In this way, they had become used to the sight of Japanese people. But riding this new Ford was a Turkish couple with sharp-edged hooked noses and blue eyes. What was even more surprising was that, differently from the Japanese, the Turks waved their hands while smiling amiably – they came to the village in such a manner.

Then, at a cheap price the Turks purchased the small acorn hill located in the west side of the town. The hill was covered with acorn trees and the children used to enter it carefree in order to pick up acorns. The Turk had already transformed the hill into his private possession, and in order to clearly demonstrate that one had to respect private property, he stretched out shining barbed wire around the foot of the hill. This meant that the children had to go twice the distance compared to before in order to collect acorns. All the while the barbed wire entanglements sparkled brightly.

The Turk's Ford was a mobile shop. He loaded his car full with cloth that had come via the field railway and went into the even deeper mountains. Within a couple of years, the trees at the top of the acorn hill were cut down, the ground was levelled and instead of the barrack that stood there before, a fairly big Western-style house was built. From this Western-style building, a square chimney protruded that was so big that it became the gossip of the town. When winter came, from this chimney a vigorous smoke was spit out and it was only this acorn hill that looked like some faraway Western country.

After a couple of years, a rumour started spreading about the Turk. Even though it was something so banal that it bordered on ridiculousness, it led the locals, who had been leading a quiet and peaceful life, to develop a quite different view. The

rumour was that the Turk not only sold fabrics, but was also a Christian preacher, and that he went to the mountains both to sell cloth and to preach.

What made this rumour seem likely was that every Sunday without fail, the Koreans who had dressed up neatly would gather in great numbers at the Turk's house on the acorn hill. The rumour went that they were using the Turk's house as a substitute for a church since the town did not have one.

Among the Japanese in the town, a number of people starting with the two old guys of the watch shop Tōkyō-dō and the liquor shop Ōmiya, and extending to the local usurer as well, firmly believed in the rumour.

Once, when the old man of the Tōkyō-dō and Morozumi of the district administration happened to come by my home, this rumour took the shape of an argument. The reason was that Morozumi, who was young in years and a person who liked to thrum the mandolin at night but within the town belonged to the intellectuals, usually showed contempt for the demeanour of the likes of the old man of the Tōkyō-dō (despite the fact that they were from the same prefecture) or the landowner from Shinano. Actually, this was not limited to Morozumi. The people employed at the bank, or the district administration, or the court somehow all displayed this kind of attitude.

"What was I saying – well, in any case, you can say it's like killing two birds with one stone," the old man of the Tōkyō-dō said, tossing his head with the greying hair. His words were clearly enunciated like *rakugo*⁷ in Tokyo (I could say that with determination because we listened to programs from Tokyo and Osaka in equal proportions) and his manner was also decisive.

"What is that supposed to mean – 'two birds with one stone'?" Morozumi said, grinning.

"What a stupid question – it's obvious. He goes to the mountains. First, he preaches the Christian faith, right? And then he sells his goods. Even if he can't sell his goods, it means he has an advantage just by preaching, because he is a pastor. We Japanese merchants can't possibly recite Buddhist sutras when selling our stuff, so he has a clear advantage as a pastor."

"Who said he's a pastor?"

"'Who, who,' you keep asking stupid questions! I ..." after that, the old man of the Tōkyō-dō sank into silence for a while.

"First of all, for Turks the religion is Mohammedanism, that is to say they belong to the Muslim faith," Morozumi said slowly and looked firmly at the old man of the Tōkyō-dō with a side glance as if to check his reaction. "In Korea, there are no Turkish Christian missionaries. They are all Americans, Englishmen or Australians, you see."

7 A Japanese form of comic verbal entertainment.

However, the old man of the Tōkyō-dō immediately launched a counter attack. As he did when repairing a clock, his round eyes narrowed slightly and sparked sharply as he was trying to figure out where the defect in Morozumi's brain lay.

"I don't know any of this complicated stuff, but still, on Sunday, the Koreans gather. You see, that's because they are using the Turk's house as a church!" the old man of the Tōkyō-dō said, and as if he was feeling relieved, the tension in his eyes melted away. However, Morozumi now gave out a really happy laugh.

"You are wrong," Morozumi said. "The missionaries coming to Korea all get sent money from their home countries and build imposing churches. That is because, ultimately, churches are the concrete symbol of Christianity."

They were thus caught in a state of opposing opinions and there was no way of reconciliation.

However, the local people did not consider the empirical method of just going to the Turk's house on Sunday and confirming the truth, or maybe they pretended not to think of it. The Japanese had come from the Buddhist household altars of their various hometowns to this faraway Naktong River in the middle of the mountains. They brought with them schools of Buddhism such as Jōdō shinshū, Sōdō, and Nichiren, and thus, for some unclear reason, they held an animosity against Christianity. Furthermore – and there were people who said that openly – it was a very common view that going to the house of the Turk who maintained friendly relations with those Koreans meant deliberately putting oneself on equal footing with them.

Be that as it may, it became the rule that, come Sunday afternoon, the Turk would take five of the Koreans on board his Ford and drive around town. Whenever the Ford drove around the town, blowing up dust while rattling and shaking, the Japanese ignored it flat out or they made a face as if their pride had been hurt. And they would not glare at the Turk, but rather at the Koreans who were riding a car for the first time in their life and looked around excitedly with curious eyes. But sometimes the Ford would run out of breath and stop, and then the Japanese would secretly feel satisfied. A frown would appear on the Turk's youthful round face and when he jumped out of the car, he would rush to a nearby house and come back with a bucket full of water. Finally, he would open the bolt attached to the front of the car and pour water into the panting engine.

It was a mild spring afternoon, and I was reading a magazine whilst nibbling on sweets. The sunlight was flooding in through the double-glazed window, and on top of the *ondol*⁸ it was so warm that I became languid. My

⁸ Traditional Korean under-floor heating.

mother had gone out, and beside me our maid Sŭnggi was flipping through a picture book. From each of the pages of the journal, gunpowder smoke rose and both the pictures and the letters in the journal proclaimed to me that in an adjoining, yet faraway place, war was happening. With a mischievous tone, I hummed a song that I had just memorised:

“Tomorrow, we’re going to capture one fort;

Last night, we slaughtered and left two forts ...”

Then, I yawned slowly at Sŭnggi, and got up, pretending to go to the toilet,

“Like a fast-paced storm

We won’t bow to China’s four hundred provinces ...”

Sŭnggi’s flat white face looked up and her narrow, slightly slant eyes were directed straight at me.

“Where are you going?” Sŭnggi asked.

“To the toilet,” I replied, but the doubt did not vanish from Sŭnggi’s light brown eyes.

In a forcedly nonchalant manner, I left the *ondol*. Of course I did not go to the toilet. Instead, muffling the sound of my steps, I entered the inner parlour. Inside, it was chilly and smelt of wet *tatami*. In the alcove, there was what I was aiming for – a black shining Belgian auto-five repeating hunting rifle.

This was my father’s pride. Every night when he came back, he would just silently polish his rifle, hardly speaking to anyone at home. The gunstock absorbed the oil as it was polished and shone softly. When the muzzle was burnished, at first it gave a slight smell of gunpowder smoke. Then, reddish metal powder swirled up from the muzzle before it sank down gradually, shining brightly. It fascinated me so much that it made my heart ache. However, father had resolutely forbidden me to touch it. When father was not there, it was mother who forbade it.

“Well, you have your air gun, don’t you? If you touch father’s rifle, I will tell him.”

This brief comment crushed me. But still, once I grabbed it. Immediately mother, who had been sitting in front of the oblong brazier, lifted herself abruptly to a half-sitting posture, raised her eyes in awareness, and with both hands grabbed the metal chopsticks that were meant to handle the brazier. This was a premonition of mother’s hysteria. At times when both of them were not home, it was Sŭnggi who resolutely forbade it, and just as far as the rifle was concerned, she suddenly changed from a maid to being a person with authority.

“Don’t you dare,” Sŭnggi said determinedly. “If you touch it, I will tell on you.”

She stuck out her chest – which was surprisingly busty, given that she was of relatively small build – and stood in my way in front of the rifle. Even when

I ignored her words and tried to touch the rifle with all my might, it was to no avail. Indeed, my body was so frail that in second grade I was diagnosed with child tuberculosis – but this had been a misdiagnosis. Only once did I manage to snatch the rifle without her noticing.

When Sǔnggi drew nearer, lifting her arms as if to threaten me, I hung the rifle over my shoulder and ran around inside the house. Sǔnggi ceased to follow me and stood still. Immediately, the area around her eyes flared up red, and out of the blue tears welled up in her eyes. She chewed on the red cloth that held the tips of her long braids, and from between her clutched teeth she uttered words that seemed intended to plead with me:

“The lady will force me to quit.”

After that, I would by no means touch the rifle in front of Sǔnggi.

However, on that day, the war that was taking place in a faraway location had unduly excited me. I approached the alcove and took the rifle into my hand – for someone as tiny as me, it was outrageously heavy. I just barely managed to support it and pretended to aim at the sliding screen. At once, it was jerked open in front of me. Above my open right eye and above the sight and bead of the rifle hung Sǔnggi’s face with a half-opened mouth. I aimed the muzzle directly at Sǔnggi’s face, and in an instant its colour changed from blue to white. At once, an almost mad happiness ran hotly through my body.

“I’m gonna shoot you,” I said. Of course, this was a joke.

“Let’s see – should I? Should I?”

I knew that father always took out the bullets. For this reason, I felt it safe to lay my finger on the trigger. Not being able to suppress my happiness, I broke into a laugh. I pulled the trigger as if to menace her, and then I shouted once more.

“Aren’t you scared, Sǔnggi? You must be scared.”

A hint of a smile appeared on Sǔnggi’s face, and she slightly tilted her head. At that moment – it was very sudden – “pa, paan” – a dreadful sound came from the entrance door. Sǔnggi and I simultaneously gave out a small screech. I dropped the rifle while Sǔnggi opened her blank eyes and stood paralysed with both her hands drooped.

Thereupon, another explosion reverberated.

This sound did not come from our entranceway, but from further outside. To be precise, it came from the park. Standing bolt upright, I exchanged glances with Sǔnggi. Then, gradually, the uproar in my heart soothed. The sound that had startled both of us ceased. Sǔnggi gave a huge sigh of relief and the blood vividly returned to her cheeks. I flew outside in order to verify the nature of the sound that had startled us. Across the sprouting poplar trees, the Ford stood still and the Turk, wearing a white shirt, was leaning over the car’s engine.

Surrounding the Ford were five Korean children whose cuffs were shining with snot. The Turk, who was suffering tremendously, closed the lid of the engine, and then took a bent metal pole that he turned in the front side of the car. He gave a strange sound and, bringing the engine to a move, suddenly provoked a reaction. When he turned the pole for the third time, the engine started moving with a dull sound; but from inside the car suddenly this “pa, paan” sound rose. This was probably what they called a backfire or an explosion in the exhaust pipe. The Turk groaned and woefully raised his hands, while the children frolicked and cheered.

I abruptly broke into laughter. Something in my belly twitched and would not stop. I thus returned to the house while spitting out a never-ending laughter from both my nose and mouth.

“Sünggi, Sünggi!” I shouted in a shrill voice. “It’s nothing – it was the Turk’s car!”

After that, I returned once more to the door. The engine groaned. The Turk pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his face. Then, he looked straight at me while cleaning his hands meticulously – his eyes were just like blue hard stones. Then he turned away, and addressed the children in Korean, and right away they all at once broke into cheers. Then, just like grasshoppers, they jumped into the car and vanished inside instantly. The Turk got into the car with an agility that did not suit his big body. He clasped the steering wheel with his hands that were covered with red hair and then turned around to me.

A gentle smile appeared on his face. This smile did not contain the least bit of ill will and it silently filled my chest my chest, making me feel at ease.

“Your father is a policeman, right?” he said. I was surprised by how smoothly he spoke Japanese, so I stammered a little when I answered him.

“He is not a policeman, he is a police sergeant.” (In this town, a police sergeant played in a different league from a policeman.)

“Oh, my bad,” the Turk laughed and his red gums were showing a little, making him seem just a little bit scary.

“Don’t you want to ride with us? Everybody’s here.”

The Turk directed the same kind of smile to the inside of the car. At that moment my heart, which had just come untied, tightened immediately. My face stiffened slightly and I shook my head. If it came out that I had ridden the Turk’s car along with the Koreans, what would my friends say? I would probably also be scolded by father. The Turk’s amiable smile vanished and instead an expression of harsh disappointment appeared on his face. Somehow it seemed as if his voice had gotten lower.

“That’s regrettable, really.”

He got into the car and then, as if he had really been addressing an adult, he uttered those words before he disappeared from my sight:

“Please come visit my house, I have a daughter. She is this small,” he demonstrated it with his hands. “She is lonely alone. Please come visit us.”

“I have a daughter. She is this small.” From thereon, those words rang in my ears many a time. When it came to foreign children, I had only seen so much as the French doll in my sister’s room.

In the summer holidays, my sister, who lived in the dormitory of her girls’ school, would come home. I felt too anxious to visit the Turk alone, so I decided that one day I would go together with her.

It was in the summer holidays, and my sister and myself had ventured to the acorn hill without either father or mother knowing. My sister, who attended second grade of her girls’ school, saw the air rifle I was carrying over my shoulder and said,

“Why did you bring that?”

“Because, if something happened, we’d be in trouble, of course,” I said sternly. My sister, who resented the fact that I called her “Angora”, bent her plumb small body, laughing heartily.

“You’re an idiot, you’re a proper child.” However, once her laughter faded, her face too became tense and she walked on; her round eyes, which resembled those of a bunny, were fixed straight forward.

“I wonder how old that girl is. Do you reckon she speaks Japanese?” I said, getting somewhat uneasy.

“Of course she does,” my sister replied and then we carried on walking. The trees of the acorn hill gently brushed their deep blue leaves against each other, the cicadas sang, there was not one cloud and the sky somehow shone brightly. The gentle slope was speckled with sunlight. We reached the level space and already, we could see the Turk’s house. The air around us somehow buzzed with the voices of people who seemed in good spirits, and when one listened closely, one could discern that they were laughing. Furthermore, this laughter oozed out from inside the Western-style house. The front door – where a great number of Korean shoes had been kicked off – was half-open and an indeterminable nervousness sprang up inside my heart.

“Oh, how cute!” my sister said, pulling my hand. “Look how cute!” She raised her happy voice. In the middle of the sunlit yard to our right, there was a sand pit where a small girl wearing nothing but white pants stretched out her legs and sat down with a flop. Her hair was unmistakably blonde and her widely opened eyes next to both sides of her pug nose were blue with a trace of grey. The girl looked in our direction and let her body bounce twice or three times, laughing. Next to her, about three Korean children were playing, but as soon as

they spotted us, they instinctively stood upright and the smile faded from their faces. They looked into each other's faces, left the sand pit and then stayed still at a spot that was slightly detached from it. Then, since my sense of superiority was awakened in my heart by this sight, I climbed into the sand pit.

But we noticed that when we tried to play with the girl, we were confronted with a terrible obstacle. When we spoke in Japanese, the girl just looked at our mouths with a baffled face.

"What is your name?"

Because the meaning did not come through even after I repeated it twice, I was really disappointed. At that point, one of the children that had been standing by the side said in fluent Japanese,

"She is called Jen." (I might have misheard this).

"I'm not asking you!"

I said angrily and the Korean children let their heads hang. This time she said something, but we did not understand at all. At that moment, a sharp doubt suddenly welled up.

"So, in which language do this girl and the Korean children talk?"

"I will try to speak in English," my sister said with grim determination. However, I was uneasy because I had secretly peeked into my sister's report book and knew that she had only seventy points in English.

"How do you do?"

The words left my sister's mouth in such a smooth way. But this, too, was of no use. This time I tried my ragged Korean.

"Your family has a car, right?" (That is what I meant to say, but of course this is my subjective view). As I did this, the girl, who had motionlessly observed my mouth to see whether I had finished talking or not, started smiling brightly and said extremely animatedly:

"*Chadongja issö!*" (We have a car)

The children, who had listened carefully to our conversation, realised that their language – which had been locked up in a dark *ondol* until then – had now just flown out into the light of the sun and, smiling lively, they approached us. Now that I had started the conversation in Korean, I needed to carry on – but I hardly knew any Korean so I had no choice but to ask questions that even I myself thought absurd.

"Does your family have a (I hesitated before pronouncing the next vocabulary) train?"

Of course there was no way they would have a train, I thought sadly. At that point, the three Korean children for some reason cut into this pathetic conversation, talking over each other. When I noticed that they were done talking enthusiastically to the girl, she suddenly gave a sweet shout, jumped up and said to me with decision,

“We have a train!”

And then she ran into her house, her plump legs reflecting the sunlight. As a proof of my vague recollection of the Korean language the girl came out an instant later, and on top of her hands unmistakably sat a train – a wooden one!

At that moment I felt that even though I had lived in this small town beneath the mountains making fun of the Koreans, now, here in the mountains, my sister and I had come to a faraway foreign country where we did not belong. All we had were the two words of “car” and “train”. And the protagonists of this foreign country were the three Korean children and the blond Turkish girl ... What stirred up this kind of unbearable feeling up even more fiercely was the appearance of a puppy.

This puppy came crawling from under the floor of the Western-style house. It was a rather dirty fellow. It was covered with spider webs from head to toe, and here and there its fur had come out in patches. It ran towards the young girl – but rather than running, it was unsteadily shaking its lower back and it really seemed drunk. Without doubt, it was also infested with parasites. But still, when the puppy appeared, both the girl and the three children at once all raised happy cheers. In front of them the puppy, just like a clown in a circus, barked happily while – pyon, pyon – bouncing up and down.

I felt compelled to say something, so I uttered this,

“Pochi!” (the dog remained indifferent), “Tarō!” (the dog remained indifferent), “Sit down, you willy! Stop! ... You idiot!”

Immediately, the puppy looked at me seemingly annoyed. It bared its small but sharp teeth and growled in a brazen manner. However, when one of the children said something to it, it stopped growling. It stood still while wagging its tail, sniffed and then slowly lifted its right front leg.

I stood still. I had the precise feeling as if that slightly dirty puppy had understood only the last of my Japanese words – “you idiot!” I drew my airgun, pulled out the lead bullets and loaded them, blinded by my anger.

My sister tickled the girl, laughing while showing off her small even teeth. The girl wriggled her white limbs while rolling about on the sand, screeching. I extended the gun barrel and aimed the muzzle at the puppy, which was running towards the girl. My unsteady body shook terribly. And then, as soon as the puppy’s filthy bottom had come before the barrel, I pulled the trigger ...

All of this happened within an instant. Suddenly, the tips of the white toes of the girl, who had fallen over on the sand, appeared in front of my gun barrel. Thus, instead of the puppy’s howl, I heard the girl breaking into a shrill cry. My sister and I ran down the hill. Her face was deep blue, and from time to time she would turn her face towards me and say something snappy. However, as if I had been plunged into a bucket and my ears were full of water, I could not

hear my sister's voice, which just seemed to give a shrill sound like that of a steam whistle. Before my inner eye twinkled the bullet that had cut slightly into the white heel of the girl. The fidgety moving mouths of the children – who were saying something – overlapped with the eyes of the Turk who came running out of the house. His eyes opened wide in fear, and we could see Korean adults who surrounded us. What is more, no one said anything to me or poured any harsh words on me. I, who was the perpetrator of this incident, was treated like an outright outsider. A despondency that was beyond comparison took hold of my entire body.

“Why is that?” This doubt did not surface as words, but instead I continued to vaguely feel that I was a particular kind of outsider.

We had arrived halfway down the hill and we were thirsty. At that moment, I could hear the sound of the Ford's engine from behind my back like the distant rumbling of the sea. When I turned around, it was already drawing near. I clung to my sister's skirt.

“Sis,” I said with a shaking voice.

“You idiot! Idiot, I said to let go!” My sister was flustered. Frightened, the two of us had stopped by the wayside, and the Ford noisily came to a halt next to us. The driver was the Turk. On the back seats next to the folded canopy sat five Koreans holding the Turk's daughter. The rims of the girl's eyes were swollen red and her tears had not yet ceased. Then, I heard the words that I had not expected at all.

“It was nothing. It's just a tiny little wound.” Before my very eyes, the Turk broke into a smile.

Seemingly wondering whether we were afraid, his blue eyes rolled around in a jesting manner. He then deliberately waved his hand at us to show that really nothing had happened.

“Well, don't you want to ride with us today? Let's go to the river!”

The bridge of my nose suddenly started aching and the Turk's bald forehead became blurry. I sobbed convulsively, pressed my face into my sister's skirt and already, I could not see anything, could not hear anything. The sound of my crying that furiously burst out upset me even more, while my shoulders shook heavily. Then my sobbing gradually ceased; when I softly raised my face, there was only the bright sunlight leaking through the green leaves. The Ford was nowhere to be seen and my sister said in a relieved voice,

“You're really an idiot, doing something like that ...”

It was blue, the sky beyond that square window. Once, in this town at the source of the Naktong River, war was happening on the same continent, beneath the same blue sky yet in a faraway, distant place – and that faraway place had evidently been where I was now. And conversely, from this spot, through the

square window, I was thinking back to the town in the mountains near the faraway, distant Naktong River.

Many a year had passed. Father had been transferred from the police force in the mountains to the city. My family moved when I was in the first year of middle school, and after that I enrolled in a school for foreign languages and moved to Tokyo.

The name of the war that had been fought in a faraway place had changed to the Greater East Asian War and had come as far as to the skies above Tokyo. The air battles – which a couple of years earlier I had fantasised of seeing with my own eyes – now unfolded virtually every day above my head. This was considerably different from the things I had imagined, and a lot of Japanese planes fell, emitting smoke. At that point it was not possible for humanities students to postpone conscription. I was sick of going to school when, instead of attending classes, all we did was evacuation work, so I lied to both the school and the granny of my boarding house and went every day to the library in Ueno to read books. Aimlessly, I placed my body in the dark and humid air – no one was there. Because I ate nothing but the rationed soya beans, I got diarrhoea; since in town they only sold *tokoroden*⁹ and lemon water, my body grew ever weaker.

One day, I was on my way back from the library, and I was walking through a squalid alley in a working-class district. The setting sun dyed the surrounding houses red. My eyes were merely two holes that absorbed the houses, fences, and people – nonetheless, I could not actually see anything. Suddenly, I saw something strange – on an old fence was stuck a piece of paper with a painting of something that shone dark. It seemed to be some shape of a human face, but its outline faintly glinted and stood out from the paper. In the same manner, the eyeballs gleamed in grey. They were devoid of life – not the tiniest fragment of life dwelled in them. This face (if a face it was) was probably the face of truth peeking from inside, no from outside, of the face on the poster.

“The caricature of a corpse’s face,” I mumbled, but as soon as I stepped forward, I was so surprised that I forgot to breathe for a second.

The uncanny trick of light had vanished. The colours had returned to their respective original shades and there was one young pilot of around my age, wearing an air force cap and gazing intently into the air. It was a poster for a film to raise fighting spirits, called “Torpedo Bombers”. The eyes of the young pilot were fixed on one point in the air and sparkled brightly. I started to doubt my own eyes, but then regained consciousness. As soon as I took a step backwards, I saw everything

⁹ Japanese noodles made from agar-agar.

once more glinting faintly. Both the colours and the letters were misleading. It was a simple thing. It was just that the poster – when it was hit by the setting sun and when seen from a particular angle – looked like that.

“A trick of light,” I thought, and I began walking again, making a sound with my feeble feet.

The next morning, in the kitchen of my boarding house I saw the wall suddenly collapsing diagonally, and after a while I felt that I was lifted up with a jerk. Two women carried me out and put me to sleep. The hands of both women were soft. In the evening, another woman cooked rice porridge mixed with soya beans for me. In the morning, yet another woman prepared miso soup. “In Tokyo, there is no one but women, only women in Tokyo” – like a hum, I repeated this, half awake and half asleep.

In the middle of the night I woke up with a clear mind; amidst the darkness, the shadow of death rose and I saw the faintly glinting face of the young pilot.

“The face of a corpse ...”

Half-remembering my own words, a gloomy, heavy premonition came crawling into the room.

“In other words, I was just seeing the surface of all things. If I had just changed my point of view a little, probably everything would’ve been completely different,” I thought. I then spoke out loud,

“Being drafted to the army in this state would be ...”

There, my words cut off. I searched for the next words within the darkness. In truth, I did not have to look anymore, as I already knew.

The next day, with the papers in my hand, I patiently stood in a long queue. A couple of days later, I crossed the blue sea on a ferry.

I stood in the middle of the park. After having spent a couple of days with my mother, I had an idea and decided to go to the town at the source of the Naktong River on the field railway.

I was surprised at how everything had so completely changed. The houses facing the park were extremely flat compared to the houses of my memory. The park as well was a surprisingly small patch of vacant land, and maybe the cow market no longer existed, because even though it was winter there was not a trace of the smell of dried cowpats.

Maybe I had changed as well, if it was only that my shorts had gotten longer and now covered the heels of my boots. I shut my eyes, and immediately the vast park appeared before my inner eye. I saw people bustling in and out of the Tōkyō-dō and the New Isahaya, and in a faraway place the war was ... I opened my eyes. In the cramped space, there was not so much as a shadow of a person, and the houses looked like they were about to collapse. All I could see was the filled sky with the low-hanging clouds, and over my

shoulder hung the Belgian auto-five repeating hunting rifle I had borrowed from my father.

I went alongside the wooden fence of the house I used to live in. The mud wall of Sŭnggi's house had collapsed and some bushels of dry grass were faintly quivering on top of the wall.

"There's no way Sŭnggi would be here," I thought. "She will have married and probably also has kids already."

In the shade of the wall, there was a woman with a silver Korean ornate hairpin that held together her hair in a bun. The woman carried a child and sang in a thin yet beautiful voice to it. I decided to ask that woman about Sŭnggi.

"Is Sŭnggi not here?"

When I directed my question to the woman, at once I overcame the long years and months that had passed. As I did this, the woman turned around and silently looked at me for a long time, and I immediately understood. The woman with this white flat face and the narrow eyes was the eighteen-year old Sŭnggi of once. The woman seemed to find it difficult to detect the boy in fifth grade of primary school in my pale, haggard face, but the Belgian auto-five repeating hunting rifle seemed to call back her memory. I then sat down on the grass next to Sŭnggi's house and chatted with her. Her eyes had become ever narrower, and creases were already thinly engraved on her forehead, revealing her fatigue. Her chest had become surprisingly flat. It was apparent that something had stolen her youth from her for all eternity, and it was not just Sŭnggi's youth that had been stolen by that something.

One day in autumn, a worn out Ford sluggishly left the town. It progressed slowly on the concrete bridge that had not been there when it had arrived, and then it stopped on the very middle of the Naktong River.

"Back then, there hadn't been a bridge like this," a woman sad, sighing; and a small woman, who had taken a seat behind her, asked,

"So, in the end, how many years have they lived in our town?"

"If only I knew! I have completely forgotten."

"I wonder whether all of their belongings will make it," the woman in the back said.

"Well, definitely up to Pusan, but after that – who knows ..."

"They can take their things to Pusan, but what do we know. Damn, the engine is puffing and panting terribly."

The old man jumped out, turned the pole at the front of the car and observed the state of the engine before flinging his hands into the air and starting to curse.

When the war changed its name, the town suddenly became noisy. Several large-scale exhibitions were held, and at the entrance of the venue hung posters on which the American president Roosevelt was wearing a loincloth. The president seemed unable to stop it from coming undone, and then next to that stood the words:

“Loose belt!”¹⁰

There were also pictures saying: “Be wary of foreigners living in Korea! They are spies!” After this exhibition, the local people’s conflicted opinions concerning the Turk were suddenly resolved.

“Regardless of whether he is a preacher or not, someone who gathers that many Koreans surely is a spy.”

Then this rumour spread. That the Turk had mingled with the Korean children who were playing among the barrels in front of the Shirakawa-ya (that was the miso shop) and had taken photos of them. The rumour said that in order to make the Japanese suffer, he used the pictures to claim that the Koreans were so poor they had to live in barrels. The police then went to the Western house to enquire politely, and of course the Turk denied the rumours flat out. However, just because the police had gone to the Western house, to the locals it was evident that the Turk was a spy, and then like mould during rainy season, rumours grew wildly all at once. Thereupon, the police went to the Western house once more in order to verify the authenticity of those rumours. Finally, one day the Turk decided to leave the acorn hill on which he had originally planned to spend the rest of his life, far away from home.

The Ford groaned, and already the canopy had holes in various places, so that it did not seem to be of great use under the rain. What is more, the spare tyre on the back of the car was sprinkled with cow dung.

Shaking heavily, the decrepit Ford began to move. The round face of the Turk slightly trembled, it had lost its gloss and had slackened like the canopy of the Ford. The Ford gradually became smaller, and on its back the last bit of liveliness that had remained in town was carried away along with it. And then, at last, it vanished in the shadows of the red mountains.

“We chased the Turk away from the village,”

I mumbled weakly. As soon as I had said this, really as if he had waited for those words, the superior private, who had a neck as thick as a wild boar, hurled abuse at my back.

¹⁰ A pun. The Japanese transliteration for “Roosevelt” is the same as for “loose belt” (*rūzuberuto*).

“What, damn, now that the Turk and the Japanese are gone, everyone is doing quite well!”

I kept quiet and turned my back at him. That was probably the truth, but it was way too late for me to realise that.

Before I knew, the sky beyond the square window became grey and a wind mixed with sleet began to blow. Give it a week and this remaining healthy private would leave too. I jabbed my finger bone against his chest pocket. Before my eyes, the Ford drove away, becoming smaller and ever smaller. My heart fluttered as my feverish eyelids followed the departing car. My eyes grew heavier, until they finally closed.

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